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ABSTRACT

A program development and implementation change agent must be a perceptive individual who: (1) can readily identify all facets of a given situation and can choose the most appropriate alternative available; (2) is knowledgeable about the day-to-day life and politics of small, rural communities; and (3) is perceived as belonging by the community people. In order to guarantee stability and permanence of a newly developed program, the change agent needs to involve as many community and school system staff members as possible in every phase of the change process. Community members can be useful co-workers when conducting community surveys, needs assessments, planning meetings, and public support campaigns. Professional staff members can be involved in identifying and writing program goals and objectives: identifying instructional materials and strategies which can be used in the program development process; establishing an instructional time sequence; developing a professional staff in-service training program; and determining the most appropriate evaluation strategy for the tasks at hand. Time is the most important commodity in the process of unfreezing (creating motivation to change), changing (developing new responses based upon new information), and refreezing (stabilizing and integrating changes). (NQ)

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Affecting Program Development and Implementation in Rural Schools - A Proposed Strategy

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Peters received his Bachelor of Science in Education degree and Masters of Education degree from the University of Maine, Orono. The Doctor of Education degree was granted by the University of Rochester, New York, in 1971.

Dr. Peters has taught mathematics, science and social studies (grades 6-12) in both rural public and private schools in the state of Maine. He has also worked with an ESEA Title III inner city program; has conducted curriculum revisions in a university laboratory school; has supervised student teachers; has been a social studies department

chairman (grades 9-12) and a social studies curriculum coordinator (K-12) in a Maine school administrative district; has been a summer session instructor in the University of Maine system; and founder/projects director of Educational Research Associates.

Dr. Peters has written several published articles in the field of environmental education; has developed a classroom simulation game; and has developed curriculum guide and resource guide materials for several ERIC clearinghouses. Currently, Dr. Peters is a consultant to several environmental education projects and is a member of the Curriculum Advisory Committee of the National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, DC .

June 1975

STATEMENT

Although nearly seventy-five per cent (75%) of the nation's population lives in urban centers, approximately 50,000,000 individuals live in rural communities. Nearly two-thirds of the nation's 18,000 school districts are located in rural areas with student bodies of less than 2,500 pupils.

Thus, there is a need to pay particular attention to the process of program development and implementation in rural schools. Whether the system structure is a multi-grade, one room school or a multi-grade, multi-room building, there are several specific characteristics of both rural communities and rural schools which must be considered.

I. APPROACH

The change agent must work with the system staff and community members. One of the general characteristics of rural communities, especially in the northeastern section of the nation, is the aloofness of the inhabitants. The typical 'Yankee' character can best be described as one of caution and a reserved trust that must be earned.

It is best if the change agent is from the local area or is, at least, well acquainted with the character and

nature of small, rural communities. The change agent must work closely with the local inhabitants, keeping them informed as to the purpose and activities of the change process.

Change is generally a threatening process. Many individuals immediately perceive loss of esteem or status. They have a tendency to either ignore or react to the situation at hand. Thus, it is important that the change agent develops community contacts and takes the time to explain the program development process - in order to calm anxieties and unfounded fears. It is vitally important that community members be involved in both information dissemination and public relations.

Community Members. Human inhabitants are the greatest resource possessed by a given community. The human factor decides the character and nature of the community and it is human labor which sustains and nurtures the system. It follows, therefore, that if the process of change is to occur within the confines of a given community that influential members of the community should be directly involved in implementing that process.

In order to insure the success of change in a given community, it is important that community members be directly involved in every aspect of program development and implementation. With direct involvement achieved at the initial stages of program development, community inhabitants can be useful co-workers when conducting:

1. community surveys. Oral and written responses to questions asked regarding the demography, economics, history, sociology and politics of the local community.

2. needs assessments. Determining the perceived needs of the community inhabitants regarding the educational curriculum and physical plant facilities.

3. planning meetings. Organizing representatives of several community interests and sectors into a work force for purposes of accomplishing stated goals and objectives.

4. public support campaigns. Activities within the community which are aimed at informing the community inhabitants and gaining their support for both program development and implementation.

5. task force organization. Members of the professional staff, as well as other members of the

community, are identified and are directly involved in program development and implementation activities.

The change agent should assess the community climate of opinion regarding public relations. If the community is not suited for a 'hard sell' campaign, the change agent should then develop and conduct a low-keyed dissemination campaign aimed at gaining and solidifying community support for change.

II. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

With the community's perceived needs identified and goals/objectives for program development established, the change agent can begin to identify materials and strategies which can be used to implement change.

Again, the change agent must involve both professional staff and community members in the process of program development. Task force members should be involved in the following types of activities:

1. Identifying and writing program goals and objectives.

2. Identifying instructional materials and strategies which can be employed in the process of program development.

3. Establishing an instructional time sequence (e.g., 50 minute periods, modular schedules, independent study periods).

4. Developing a professional staff in-service training program.

5. Determining the most appropriate evaluation strategy for the tasks at hand.

When assessing the importance and role of each factor involved in the process of change called program development, there is a need to prioritize the significance of each factor in a given situation.

However these factors are arranged in order of effect and significance to a given situation, they are simply TOOLS that can be used to accomplish and implement change. Some of these factors are:

1. staff visitations to models; other classrooms, other schools, other programs of instruction.

2. money; financial resources.

3. people; staff, consultants and community members.

4. resources; instructional and support materials.

5. physical plant facilities; floor space and equipment.

6. release time and modular schedules.

7. in-service training program(s); demonstrations, lectures, materials workshops.

8. community facilities and services.

The most important change process commodity is TIME ! If the change agent does not provide sufficient time for:

1. organizing
2. planning
3. affecting attitudinal and behavioral changes
4. developing
5. implementing
6. evaluating
7. revising ... then the tried and tested change process strategy which includes the stages of unfreezing (creating motivation to change), changing (developing new responses based upon new information) and refreezing (stabilizing and integrating changes) cannot occur.

Without ample time, a program cannot have broad based support. Without support, a program cannot have stability. Without stability, a program cannot survive !

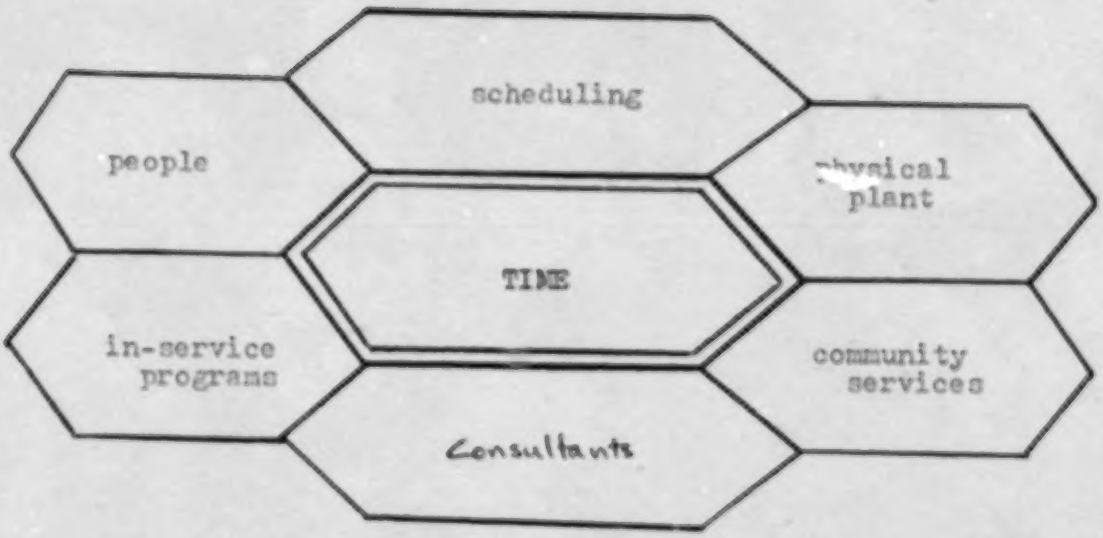

Diagram I. TIME: The Critical Factor

How To Achieve Time. There are several ways by which the change agent can guarantee the time necessary to bring about program development. The change agent must be keenly aware of the community attitudes and values regarding an organizational approach and structure that might smack of bureaucracy. If the climate of opinion regarding organization and structure is one of disfavor and distrust, then the change agent should not attempt to develop a highly sophisticated, highly publicized organizational strategy. To ignore community sentiment and to proceed with the creation of an elaborate organizational structure will only result in community distrust and no support for program change. If the program is not accepted by the local community then it will die! If, on the other hand, an assessment of the community's attitude toward organization and structure is positive and encouraging, then the change agent must proceed in a manner which will insure the structure needed in order to accomplish tasks.

If it is advisable for the change agent to initiate

and employ a strategy that provides for time and its proper utilization, then he/she can:

1. develop a PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) or critical path network for the purpose of identifying each step in the process of program development and for determining the amount of time necessary to accomplish each identified task.

2. obtain from the school system administration a commitment to support the timely process of change. This commitment will be evidenced by changes in teacher scheduling to allow them to directly participate in process activities.

3. develop a management-by-objectives (MBO) format which will clarify teacher roles and tasks. The MBO approach will enable everyone involved in the change process to clearly understand the part they will play in the total process. Everyone will be able to identify and understand both self and other's expectations.

III. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The process of change is cyclical in both construct and function. It is an on-going process that requires continual attention and direct involvement of the change

agent and teachers/administrators. If a program is to be relevant to the needs of the instructional process, then it must constantly be evaluated and revised.

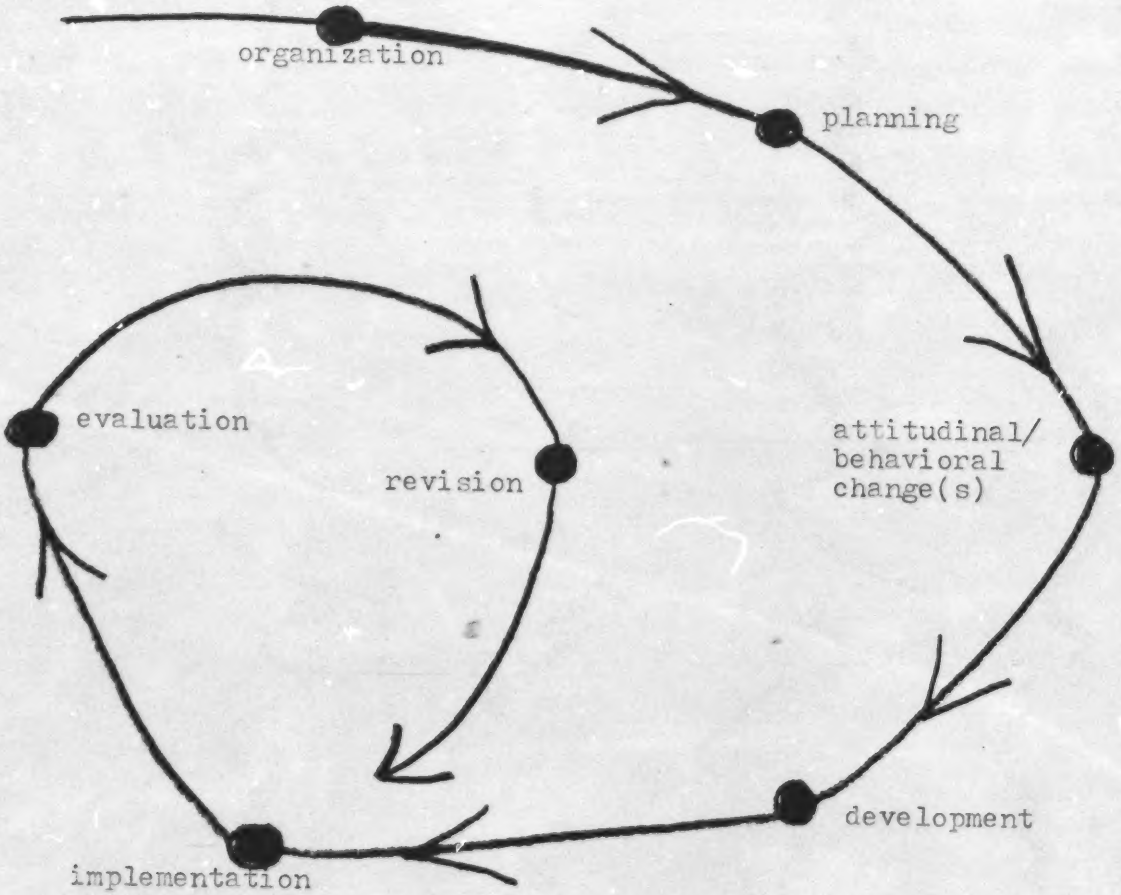

Diagram II. The Cyclical Process

If change is to be on-going, teachers must have a vested interest in both the process and the product. It is the change agent's responsibility to see to it that direct teacher participation is achieved.

Staff Development for Instructional Enrichment. In most rural school systems, in-service training for purposes of staff development is unheard of. Most teachers in these systems look forward to the college or university level summer session program as a means of accomplishing one or more goals:

1. enriching one's knowledge and/or skills in a given academic or activities area.

2. accumulating a specified number of credits for purposes of professional recertification.

3. enjoying a restful, relaxed break from the daily routine of teaching.

4. an opportunity to meet old acquaintances and to make new friends.

In the opinion of many teachers, direct involvement in an on-going process of knowledge and skills enrichment is a threatening situation because closely allied with

in-service training is the concept of accountability. Thus, to be involved in a program of in-service training may well lead immediate supervisors and community members to hold a higher level of performance expectations. To other professional staff members, the idea of receiving in-service training is not only an appealing opportunity to improve one's performance, but also a highly professional way of meeting teachers' immediate needs - during the school year - when they seek answers to their questions.

The advantages of in-service enrichment are several:

1. locally developed programs involve classroom teachers in both goals and objectives development and program planning. Thus, these programs are attuned to the real needs and concerns of classroom teachers.

2. local, rural school systems can assess the needs of their staffs more readily than can institutions of higher learning which are physically removed from the immediate classroom setting. Thus, in-service programs can be developed which meet immediate needs that are relevant to the local situation.

3. commercial workshops, geared to the needs of both rural systems and their faculties, can enlist the services and talents of well-known experts and specialists who would rot normally be made available to smaller, more-remote systems and staffs.

4. the philosophical basis of in-service workshops has a dual character; immediacy and relevancy. The change agent should see to it that training programs are developed which meet the specific needs of teachers and can be conducted at a point-in-time when most advantageous to the learning process of students and teachers.

When attempting to effect change within a given school or system, the change agent will be confronted with a wide spectrum of teacher attitudes, experiences and professional training. Because of this diversity in backgrounds and experience, there is a need for the change agent to identify and capitalize upon a common denominator; that is, to build upon an identifiable quality or quantity that exists within the character and nature of each and every classroom teacher.

In-service training is a valuable tool for effecting change in staff attitudes and behaviors. The character of staff development should fit the need(s) of the particular situation under consideration. Relevancy to the needs of the local system is absolutely necessary if the program being developed and implemented is to survive infancy and it to blossom into a mature, stable entity. The change agent is responsible to see to it that all system personnel who are either directly or indirectly involved in the educational change process are identified and participate in the in-service training program.

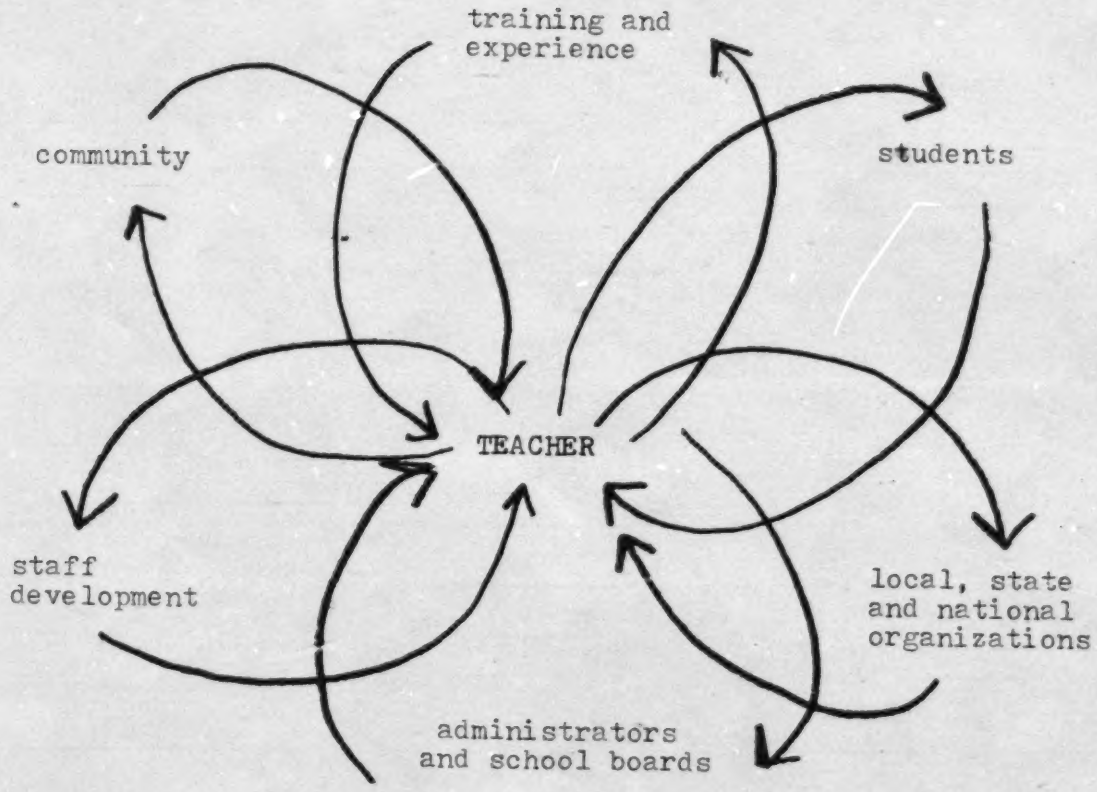

Diagram III. Factors Effecting Teacher Attitudes and Behavior

The Structure of Cellular Learning. The learning process consists of two interrelated phenomena; Primary and Secondary cells. These identifiable cells interact constantly to form honeycombed complexes. While Primary cells are directly related to the competencies of instruction and learning, other cells perform secondary functions which enhance and reinforce affective, cognitive and psycho-motor skills development.

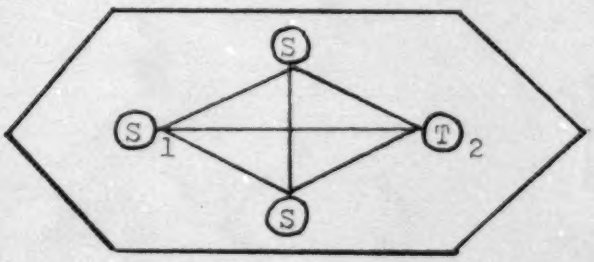

Diagram IV. Primary Learning Cell

The environment of the Primary Learning Cell consists of the day to day interactions of students[1]/teachers[2] and students[1]/students[1] .

There are several devices and qualities which can directly and indirectly effect and influence the learning process. These entities are called Secondary Learning Cells.

Instructional Media Cells (IMC). A variety of audio-visual media hardware and software can be used both in the classroom and outdoors to affect and enrich the learning process which takes place in the Primary Learning Cells. The prime value of IMC devices lies in their accessibility for utilization when most advantageous to the processes of inquiry and skills development.

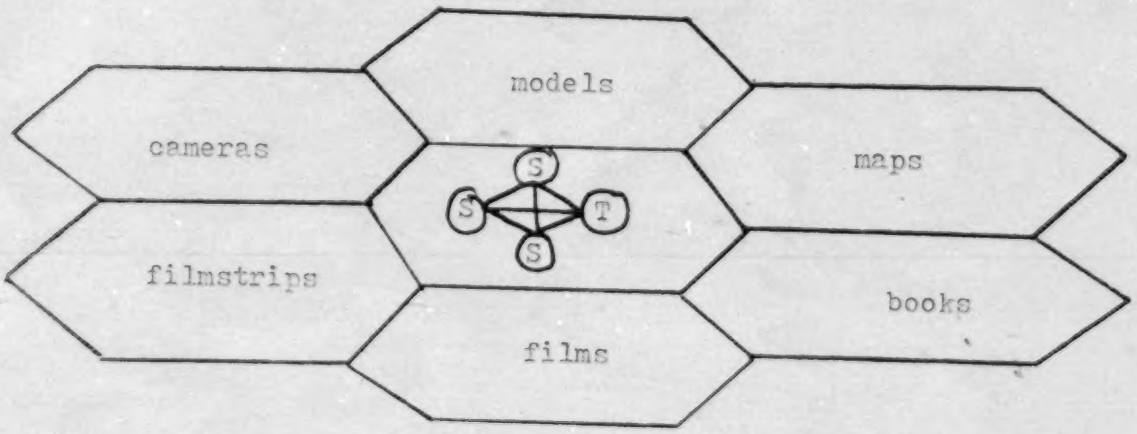

Diagram V. An IMC Model

Organizational Cells (OC). These structural secondary cellular components encourage and enhance the stated and implied goals and objectives of a given instructional program. Organizational cell phenomena both singularly and collectively effect the operationalization of the Primary Learning Cells and the utilization of Secondary IMC devices.

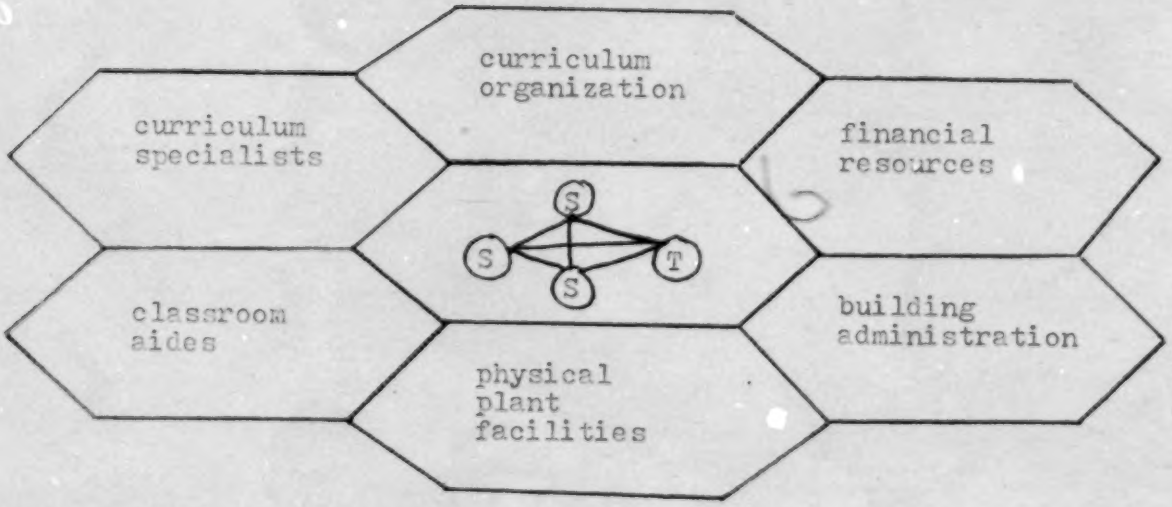

Diagram VI. An OC Model

Rural school staff members must be provided the opportunity for in-service exposure to and continual interaction with learning cell devices and strategies. It is important to teachers that support staff personnel be recruited from the surrounding area(s) and be made available to assist them in the implementation of classroom activities.

The support staff can function properly only if adequate local financial resources are made available for purposes of employing these individuals on a short-term contracted services basis. In most rural communities which have an economic base generally dependent upon a single industry, it is difficult to raise sufficient funds to properly support and maintain an active, on-going in-service training program. The availability of local funds is a real problem which the change agent must recognize and confront. The answer to the problem might be a one-shot approach to skills development whereby a resource person presents a release time workshop for all teachers at a particular grade level. The change agent can then follow up this presentation with a series of minishops which are directly related to the topic and are conducted by the change agent or teachers from within

the system. In this manner, the classroom teacher becomes a resource to fellow teachers and the system gains maximum usage of its professional teaching staff.

With adequate financial resources available for an in-depth training program, the support staff may present demonstration or micro-teaching lessons, conduct small group workshop follow-up seminars, provide necessary instructional materials, assist teachers in classrooms as instructional aides or video tape classroom activities for teacher self evaluation.

Community Resources. Those new to the teaching profession, as well as veterans of the classroom, should develop both an awareness of and sensitivity for those natural and social (man-made) elements of a given rural community which can be used for affective, cognitive and/or psycho-motor learning and enrichment activities/experiences.

a. Environmental Education: A multi-grade EE program can direct student attention to the totality of MAN's daily life and be the vehicle by which youngsters are exposed to the environment in which they live. Students can be made aware of the environmental phenomena which effect and influence

their attitudes, habits, cognitive learning and values. They can begin to see how their local community is dependent upon the land and nature's resources for its existance and survival. They will also learn how the human inhabitants of their rural community manage resources, utilize the land and determine their own destinies.

b. Vocational Education. A program which emphasizes on-the-job training can capitalize upon a wide variety of available community facilities. For those rural or small schools that cannot duplicate the facilities and human resources of social enterprises (e.g., manufacturing plants, retail stores, hospitals, banks), an awareness of existing facilities within the community is the first step to be taken in the process of locating students at worksites for purposes of skills acquisition and application.

Student awareness can be enhanced with the use of:

1. field trip tours to local resource facilities.

2. vicarious exposure via films, slides and/or video tapes.

3. guest speakers who go into classrooms to discuss the character and nature of resource facilities and to describe their jobs.

The value of resource site utilization in the instructional process is that small schools with limited financial resources can supplement existing facilities, staff skills and school services by using the facilities, humar skills and services of resource sites as 'community classrooms' . In this way, the power of the school syster and staff to educate students is enhanced and the physical plant facilities of the school are supplemented and instructional floor space is increased. The utilization of community resource facilities as classrooms contributes to the development of a more broad based curriculum.

One task of the change agent is to help identify the instructional resources of the community and then to describe the instructional value of each site. This cataloging of site phenomena can be compiled into a resource document and distributed to classroom teachers. The teachers can use the document as a community resource guide and can plan student exposure to selected sites when most appropriate to instruction and learning. This type of document is relatively inexpensive to produce and is a resource which teachers can use for several years.

Thus, for the small, rural school system that cannot afford expensive resource materials, the community resource guide, developed within the community - using community members to assist in the task of compiling and writing, is an inexpensive instructional tool.

The School Day Concept. Traditionally, the school day has been defined by school boards, school administrators, teachers, students, parents and community members, in general, as from five to seven hours of direct teacher-pupil contact time. What is more interesting, contact time has generally been confined or restricted to the classroom.

1. There is a need to incorporate the world outside the school into the process of instruction.

2. There is a need to build a great variety of teacher activities into the 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. school day.

3. There is a need to involve teachers in the processes of program development and program implementation.

4. There is a need to involve teachers in an in-service training program.

With the advent of experimental education projects both in rural and urban schools (e.g., ESEA Title I, ESEA Title III, NIE's Experimental Schools projects), during the past fifteen years, a greater emphasis has been placed on direct teacher involvement in curriculum development and team teaching/team planning.

No longer can the school day be defined simply as classroom related teacher-pupil contact time. Increased expectations of teachers, as held by others, regarding lesson planning and program development require that teachers be freed during school day hours to meet, to discuss and to plan.

There are several ways by which certified classroom teachers can be released from teaching duties to become involved in some aspect of program development (e.g., planning sessions, lesson writing, workshops, visitations).

1. The hiring of certified teacher aides or the creation of a pool of certified 'short duty' substitute teachers.

2. Modular scheduling plans.

3. Early student dismissal in the classroom.

4. Activities are scheduled prior to the start of school in the morning hours.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

There are three other variables which have a direct effect upon small, rural school systems in the northeastern section of the nation. At times, the three variables interact and have a combined effect upon a decision or an issue clarification. In other instances, each variable functions separately - often moving in opposite directions with differing degrees of momentum and thrust.

1. Organizational Structure. In the northeastern section of the nation; specifically, northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont), the change agent will encounter a wide spectrum of organizational patterns.

a. School system : a legal entity (e.g., town or city) financially supports its own schools. The school system is managed by an elected school board and a superintendent of schools.

b. School district: a rural area financially supports its own schools and accepts students from all sections of the district. A district can encompass more than one town within a given geographical area. The system is managed by an elected school board and a superintendent of schools.

c. School union: a composite of several rural communities which are autonomous - having an elected school board. Each district comprising the union maintains a school board and the superintendent of schools is generally the single unifying force within the union construct.

d. School administrative district: a legal reorganization of previously autonomous school districts or systems. Autonomous district or system school boards are legally dissolved and a SAD-wide board is elected to terms of office of from three to five years. Both the reorganized school board and the superintendent of schools are the system's unifying forces.

The organizational structure of the small, rural system greatly effects the change agent's performance of duties. The larger the system in size, the greater is the economic base of financial support, the more-modern the physical plant(s), the greater the ability of the system to attract highly qualified professionals and the greater the degree of community support for innovation and program development.

Since the Korean War, many independent school systems have been forced to allied themselves with neighboring systems for both economic and political reasons. Thus, there has been a growth in the number of school unions and SADs in northern New England over the past twenty years. Consolidation of resources and finances has resulted in rural systems that can begin to bargin for the services of better teachers, afford the most up-to-date equipment and materials, and provide their students with the best instructional programs available.

2. School Boards. Whether in rural or urban centers, school board members are elected by the community populace and are charged with the responsibility of overseeing the operation of the schools. In turn, the board will employ the services of a professional advisor; the superintendent of schools, and charge him with the day to day management of the system.

School boards both give direction to and reflect the climate of opinion and politics of the community. Teachers and other school system personnel are subordinate to the board and are hired and fired by the school board - with the recommendation of the superintendent of schools.

Whenever attempting to effect change within a rural system, the change agent must:

a. acknowledge the existance of the school board(s).

b. be familiar with the character and political persuasion of each and every board member.

c. keep board members continually informed as to the progress being made in program development.

d. gain board member support for the prescribed process of change that is taking place within the system.

e. directly involve board members in several aspects of program development (e.g., community surveys, needs

assessments, in-service training, advisory boards).

The change agent must also develop a good working relationship with the superintendent of schools. The superintendent is not only the change agent's immediate superior and contact with the school board, but also the contact with the day to day operations of the system. It is the superintendent of schools who can bring both influence and pressure to bear on individual school board members and their collective decisions.

A superintendent of schools can function in one of three leadership styles. The style which he/she chooses to adopt as a personal modus operandi will have great effect upon the degree of success of program development and implementation within the given system.

Style # 1. The authoritarian administrator make all decisions and expects others in the chain-of-command to carry out orders. Decision making is shared with no-one.

Style # 2. The laissez-faire administrator assumes very little authority and provides almost no leadership. Members of the organization compete for power and authority. The leadership role is in constant flux and power is shared by many.

Style # 3. The democratic administrator shares his authority with others - delegating authority and decision making responsibilities to others within the system. The democratic leader does not alone make arbitrary decisions but relies upon group consensus for direction and support.

3. Town Meetings. The town meeting is traditional in both the governance and politics of the six New England states; Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The town meeting provides members of the community with the opportunity to directly participate in deciding the year-to-year management and operation of the community - including the operations of the school.

Because community members greatly influence the functioning of the school system and determine the operating budget, the change agent must strive to organize and conduct a public information program for purposes of gaining public support for program development and implementation. The public information program can employ:

a. presentations to community based service organizations such as the Grange, Lions, Moose, Rotary Club and 4H.

b. reports to the community published in the local newspaper.

c. presentations to the school board(s).

d. the accounting of activities in the annual town report.

SUMMARY

The program development and implementation change agent has a responsibility to involve community members and school system staff members in each and every phase of the process of change; from initial planning discussions through to evaluation of the product.

The change agent must be a perceptive individual who can readily identify all facets of a given situation and can choose the most appropriate alternative available to him/her. The change agent should be an individual who is knowledgable about the day to day life and politics of small, rural communities and who is one that the community people can perceive as belonging.

The process of unfreezing, changing and refreezing is both time consuming and physically exhausting. In order to guarantee stability and permanance of a newly developed program, the change agent must see to it that as many community people as possible have in-put into the decision making process and develop a perceived vested interest in the product. Partnership in the process and responsibility for the product will result in commitment to and maintenance of the program.